

Assemblyman PAUL KORETZ

Forty-second Assembly District

proudly representing the communities of West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, Century City, Westwood, Bel Air, Brentwood, West Los Angeles, Hollywood, Hancock Park, Universal City, Studio City, and Sherman Oaks



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Koretz Bill To Prevent Further Deaths From Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Around Boats

AB 2222 – the Anthony Farr and Stacy Beckett Boating Safety Act named after two children who died while boating with friends and family

(Sacramento) - At a press conference at the State Capitol today, Assemblyman Paul Koretz (D-West Hollywood) and Assemblymember Gloria Negrete McLeod (D-Chino) announced new legislation to address the alarming trend of individuals dying from exposure to carbon monoxide (CO) emissions from boat engines. Koretz was joined by families of victims of this tragic poisoning, as well doctors, nurses and firefighters. AB 2222 will be known as Anthony and Stacy's Law.

Marine engines are not subject to the same emission controls as cars and therefore emit dangerously high CO concentrations into the atmosphere, exposing anyone nearby to potentially lethal amounts of CO. Federal officials have known for some time that CO can reach lethal concentrations from generator exhaust that gathers at the stern of houseboats, but only in the last three years have they found evidence that CO can gather in deadly concentrations behind ski boats, cabin cruisers and even personal watercraft. The highest concentrations of CO are often around swim decks and areas where occupants frequently sit or swim at the rear of the boat because the exhaust ports are located nearby.

"In the last few years, there have been dozens of deaths around the country, of both children and adults, due to CO poisoning while they are swimming near or being dragged behind boats," said Assemblyman Koretz. "It's a very scary phenomenon that everyone should know about."

Many of the incidents have occurred at the popular recreation areas at Lake Powell on the Utah/Arizona border as well as Lake Havasu on the Arizona/California border. The new trend of "teak surfing" or "dragging" where individuals hold on to the swim platform (usually made of teak wood) and then let go to body surf the boat's wake while the boat moves forward seems to have increased the number of these poisonings.

Three California families have recently suffered a devastating loss due to CO poisoning around boats. In May of 2003, 11-year old Anthony Farr of El Dorado Hills died at Folsom Lake after being overcome by carbon monoxide while bodysurfing behind a family friend's boat. In September of 2001, 62-year-old Bruce Allen (Skip) Bauer died while swimming near his boat at Lake Shasta, and in July of 2000, 15-year-old Stacy Beckett of Ontario died while bodysurfing behind a boat in Mexico.

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“The loss of Anthony and Stacy, two beautiful and vibrant children, as well as the loss of Skip, who was adored by his family, was absolutely devastating to their families,” said Assemblyman Koretz. “Unfortunately, their families learned about this risk after it was too late -- but they are now on a mission of love. They want to make sure others never suffer the kind of senseless tragedy they have had to endure,” he said.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Dept. of Interior Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Coast Guard have studied this issue extensively and reported that these poisonings have reached “epidemic proportions.” They have tracked 101 deaths and 402 poisonings through October 2003 (with 34 poisonings in California alone); and these numbers likely under-report the actual number of incidents.

AB 2222 requires the Department of Boating and Waterways (DBW) and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to work together to better inform boat owners about the CO poisoning danger. The bill also requires DBW to incorporate information into state boating safety courses about CO poisoning while boating and how to prevent it. Finally, the bill calls upon the boating industry to be “good corporate citizens” and voluntarily take immediate steps to reduce the CO emissions from their engines, redesign their boats to eliminate the risk to swimmers and passengers from the exhaust, and until that can be accomplished, to launch a statewide public awareness campaign to better educate boaters about this risk.

“The bottom line is that the best way to eliminate this danger is to cut the poison off at its source. It is possible to make cleaner burning engines for boats,” said Koretz. “But until the boating industry acknowledges their responsibility and takes action, we must make sure every boater understands that being behind a boat when the engine is running can kill you.”

AB 2222 will likely be heard in policy committee in later March or early April.

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